

# *Quad City Times*

Saturday, April 2nd, 2005

## **What makes us great?**

Anita Walker wanted some of the Quad-Cities' young professionals to shake off Midwestern circumspect and acknowledge there are some things truly great about living here.

The group we assembled this week was way ahead of her.

Ian Frink showed up with a list of 10 years worth of cool stuff that had happened around here. Other members of the group were quickly adding on: The IMAX. The Botanical Center. Quad-City Sports Center. TPC at Deere Run. Bike paths. The group was deep into the list and they still hadn't hit on Davenport's River Renaissance improvements. The group gathered at one of our great cultural amenities, River Music Experience, to meet with Iowa's go-to person on cultural amenities. Anita Walker is director of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, a good enough job made better this week. Now she's leading a drive to dole out \$8 million in grants to create Great Places in Iowa.

We asked Walker to meet with a group of Quad-Citians under 40 who are choosing to establish careers right here. Frink, a vice president with Crawford Co. started the discussion about what makes a great place. He focused on the River Vision planning which brought together Quad-Citians from Rock Island and Davenport to envision what the riverfront could look like.

Marguerite White, owner of Premier Cleaning, recalled her days in Oklahoma City, where the Bricktown district brought together all different kinds of people. Nathan Sondgeroth (sp?), an attorney with Hopkins and Huebner, reflected on nearby open farm spaces that keep him connected to his own rural upbringing. Melissa Kleinschmidt, with DavenportOne, described Indianapolis' vibrant downtown, interconnected with paths and walkways.

## **Beyond Fuddruckers**

Everyone has their own definition of a Great Place, but Walker quickly identified the common denominator. "You described our experiences, not the things, but the experiences the things create." That sounded good to Hillary Rhodes, editor of the Times' Yourmomonline.com. But it didn't jibe with her own Q-C experience. Rhodes, from Boston, spotted a Quad-City phenomenon that leaves her cold: "People seem to go crazy when a new chain store shows up. There's a new Fuddruckers on 53rd!" To Rhodes, it seems that makes us just like everyone else.

The observation brought nods of agreement. Conformity does seem to offer affirmation to some Quad-Citians who tend to assess our community by what we don't have.

Walker sees it differently. "The reason I think 'Davenport' when I think about Great Places is because everything here has roots. It is anchored in this community."

Here is what she means: New stuff, like the brand new Figge Art Center. Old stuff like the Bix fest and Mississippi Valley Blues fest. The Mark. John O'Donnell stadium. You can find art museums, music fests, arenas and ball stadiums everywhere. In the Quad-Cities, you find them all linked to our river.

Street corner strange.

Walker remembered a comment she picked up from an Austin, Texas mayor, who said his town needs to embrace "everything from high art to street-corner strange." Across the table, RME president Lon Bozarth, an Austin native, smiled and elaborated. "Austin wasn't looking for a short-term fix. It was looking to create a long-term attitude." That attitude left Austin reknown for a music scene, not for any particular building. Bozarth intends for our RME to find and foster our own attitude. Attitude. Experiences. Walker pretty much outlined what it will take to get the attention of her Great Places initiative and win a piece of that \$8 million to create and market them in our Quad-Cities. Attitude is something many midwesterners literally shy away from. Indeed, for many, the definition of a Great Place is some place few people know about. . We'll agree with our roundtable group: Get over it. Before we can convince everybody else we live in a Great Place, we have to convince ourselves. Times editorial board roundtable. Iowa will dole out \$8 million to create and promote Great Places. The leader of that effort, Anita Walker, sat down with the Times and some young Quad-City professionals this week at the River Music Experience in Davenport to talk about what makes a Great Place.

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## **Quad-Cities brought them back**

Four young professionals who joined our editorial board meeting with Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs Director Anita Walker shared one thing in common. All had moved back to the Quad-Cities after leaving for a short time. .

Here's why:

**Nathan Sondgeroth.**

Attorney, Hopkins & Huebner, P.C., Davenport.

While in college at Augustana, I met my wife Jennifer. After I finished law school at the University of Iowa and she finished her graduate school work in speech pathology at Purdue, we focused our job searches on this area. Jennifer and I formed favorable impressions of the Quad-Cities as college students. Those impressions brought us back here and convinced us to make this place our home.

**Ian Frink**

Vice president, Crawford Co., Rock Island.

After growing up in the area, I moved away for 10 years; first Wisconsin, then Maryland. Every time I returned home, during the 1990s, I noticed something new. The area was continually undergoing substantial development. The growth was exciting, plus the community has always had appealing factors: genuine people, affordable living and a great river. An opportunity to return home and work at Crawford Co. was presented in 2000 and I didn't think twice.

**Margeurite White**

Owner, Premier Cleaning

I decided to come back from Oklahoma City to be at home when I went to St. Ambrose. My intention was to get a degree and get a good job in Chicago. But I found this new business. My goal is to have unlimited potential for income by owning my own business, Premier Cleaning. This is my comfort zone.

**Melissa Kleinschmidt**

DavenportOne

After living in the area for 3 years, I moved away to try other cities believing that larger metropolitan areas offered more opportunity to further my career. I soon discovered that by coming back to the Quad-Cities, I was able to advance professionally at a quicker pace than my peers, and often am given the opportunity to actively participate in exciting and innovative projects with some of the most charismatic people I have ever met. Combined with the fact that my family is in the area, as well as a great circle of friends, it seems the best place for me is right back where I started.

### **Why did you come back? What brought you back?**

Tell us your story of returning to the Quad-Cities. Send it to [opinions@qctimes.com](mailto:opinions@qctimes.com), or to Editorial Page, 500 E. 3rd St., Davenport, Iowa, 52801. Please include your name, address and phone number.